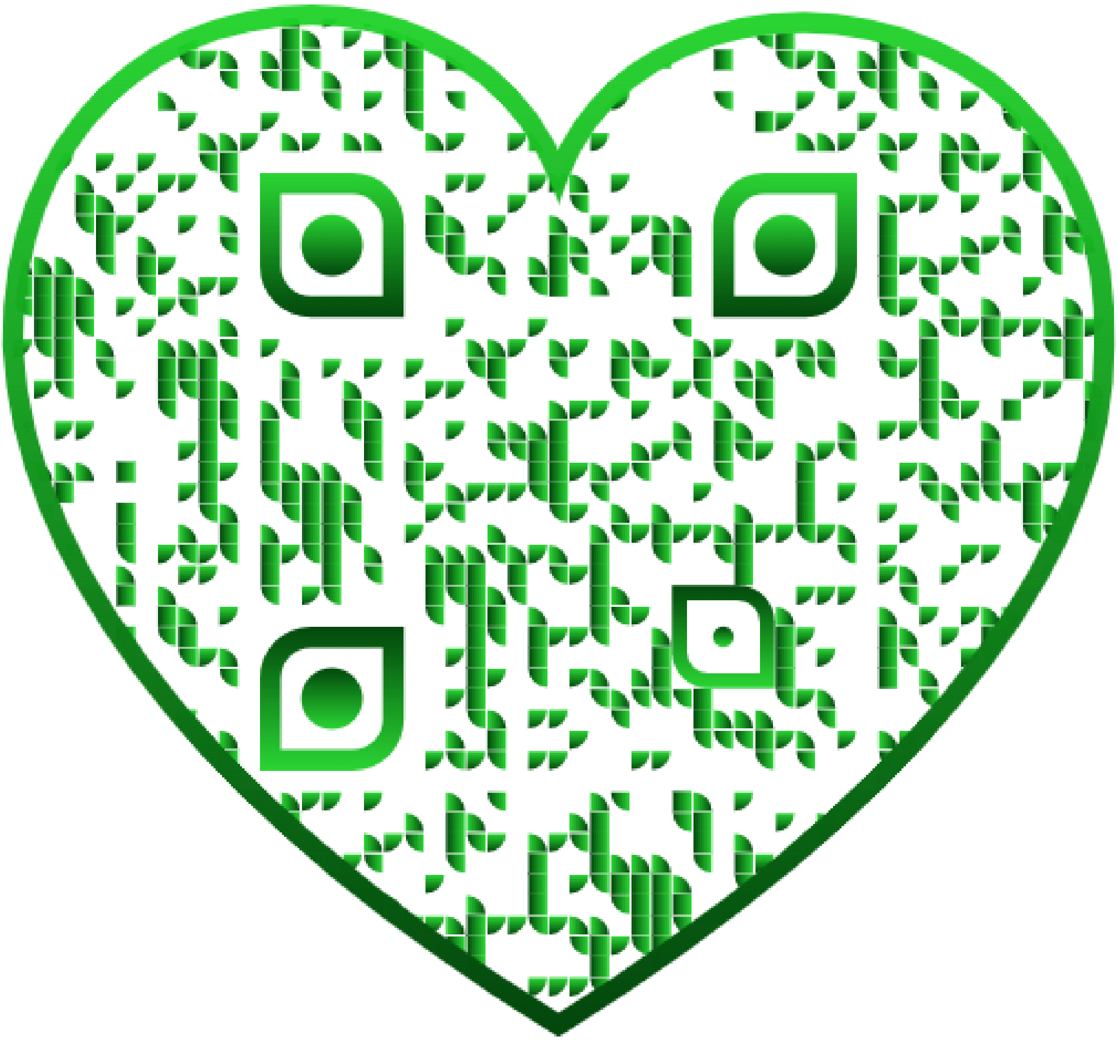
BABES BAKE
MAGAZINE

WINTER 2025-2026

NORTH STAR SPEAKEASY
COOKIE RECIPE COLLECTION

HOLIDAY
AFTER HOURS
COOKIES, COCKTAILS, + GOOD COMPANY



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LETTER FROM *the editor*

Welcome to the first edition of Babes Bake Magazine. I'm thrilled to be part of this project, a place where bakers, dreamers, and purveyors of La Dolce Vita finally get to sit at the same table.

I was talking with a friend recently about the pressure to celebrate the holidays "properly." You know, the people-packed parties, the extravagant gifts, the manufactured magic we're told to chase. It's easy to lose ourselves in rituals we never questioned. Do we just black out, run the circuit, and wake up in January? Absolutely not.

Here's the thing I keep coming back to: we can't control most of life, but we can choose how our year ends. Curveballs will always be part of the story, but no matter how messy, mundane, or miraculous the months before have been, December is still ours to shape.

That's what this issue is about. It's a reminder that the holidays don't have to happen to you. Instead, you get to design them. You deserve rituals that feel good, gifts that feel intentional, and moments that mean something to you, not just everyone else.

If you're single while the world feels overwhelmingly coupled, you'll find warmth and belonging in **In Good Company**. If gifting has started to feel more like an obligation than a celebration, **Cookies Against Capitalism** reframes the cookie box into something stylish, intentional, and yes, partly for you. And if you're craving a getaway without boarding a plane, **Sorry Kids, We Have Aspen at Home** delivers a delightfully absurd retreat that requires no PTO. And what would a baking magazine be without recipes? Our **North Star Speakeasy** bakes give classic flavors a modern, grown-up twist.

Every piece in this issue shares a single thread: creating space for yourself in a chaotic world. Not when everything'sperfect. Not when you "earned it." Right now.

So pour yourself a drink, kick back, and enjoy.

Cheers to a holiday that feels like yours, a new year that begins on your terms, and the very first issue of Babes Bake Magazine. I'm glad you're here.

Jenna

BABES *BAKE*

Baking that takes you places.

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Golden milk gets an upgrade with turmeric laced white chocolate chip cookies. See Page 27 for the recipe.

BABES BAKE

Baking that takes you places.

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Picture this: Sicily in the wintertime, 2025.

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PERSONAL DISPATCH

Sorry, kids.

WE HAVE ASPEN AT HOME

The art of creating your own slopes when the closest thing to snow is the freezer aisle.

BY NIKKI DUNCAN //
PHOTOS EDITED BY AMIRA FRANZEN

Aspen. It's the kind of place people talk about as if it were Mount Olympus. A mythical vacation destination where snow falls in silver flakes, whiskey flows endlessly from aged oak barrels, and the kind of people who slosh around the word "après" with one pinky held high.

I love that idea.
I really do.

And maybe there's a version of me that lives in Aspen. She wakes up to the postcard snowfall, zips herself into a Moncler jumpsuit, and skis down an aggressively photogenic mountain right into the biggest fondue pot known to man.

Then there's the real me. The one who lives in Florida. No hills. No snow. No luxury chalet to dry my boots next to a crackling fireplace. The one sweating in my living room, blasting the AC as high as it will go without needing an HVAC technician, and strapped into an Aeroski machine I bought off Facebook Marketplace from a guy named Dennis.

Was it glamorous? Absolutely *not.*
Did it work? As ridiculous as it was, *yes.*

PERSONAL DISPATCH

Everyone loves the idea of an Aspen holiday. I mean, let's be honest. Jaunting around the slopes with a ski pole in one hand and a charcuterie fork in the other. Rubbing elbows with money and ego. Pretending we know the difference between a 2021 Cabernet and a two-buck Chuck. Sniffing the glass rim and muttering "*tannins*" before a quick gurgle and a satisfied sigh.

Admirable. A dream, for sure. I just don't like the price of the airfare or sitting next to people on planes who zone out while chewing gum with their mouths open. But every winter, I find myself watching other people's slope stories, and I think to myself, *maybe this year.*

So I did what any sensible, slightly delusional creative would do. I brought Aspen to me.

Dennis just happened to be selling his wife's Aeroski machine for pennies. A steal, really, considering how great it would look next to my rowing machine-turned-coat-rack. I paired it with the VR headset I'd also scored on Facebook Marketplace a few weeks earlier. The AC cranked to Arctic Tundra. And there I was. Fresh powder. Crisp mountain air (freon, technically). *Ahh, Aspen.*

I didn't even bail once. Truth be told, that's how I knew it wasn't the real Aspen. But I did break a sweat, curse once or twice getting dangerously close to that one fir tree, and suffered the kind of muscle burn that makes you believe you're headed to the Olympics instead of the couch. By the end, I was high on endorphins and irony.

Any good trip deserves an even better meal. When in Aspen, we do as Aspen does: *Après ski.*

APRÈS, S'IL VOUS PLAÎT

Bubbling brie always looks its best when it's barely holding its shape on a small wooden cutting board. A spoonful of cherry jam dragged through the center in a sweet and salty slow-motion collision. Surrounded by cubes of crusty homemade sourdough, toasted and salty Marcona almonds still warm from the pan, and a few slices of crunchy carrots rounded out the snacks.

This restaurant is self-serve only. The most luxurious of buffets, where no one judges on the number of servings or your choice of bathrobe. This chalet isn't what you might consider a destination spot, but it's rated 5 stars and is my kind of luxurious.

Any respectable ski lodge serves liquor with its bites. Hell, I had the bottle of Aperol open before I even put on the VR headset. An Apple Aperol Spritz was on the menu, doused with a little more Aperol than necessary and a fat slice of orange on the rim to bring out the bitter orange flavor. After being in the snow–and looking at the sizable block of brie oozing into the board–a good dose of vitamin C sounded like a smart choice. Indeed, it was.

Sunken into the couch with my feet up, my fingers scraped the last of the brie onto a crust of bread. A triple cream rind blistered from the flame–too good to leave behind. Drowned with the last sip of spritz and a deep sigh of contentment. Hopefully I would remember to tip the restaurant staff.

No, it wasn't authentic Aspen by any means. But it was *my* version. One enjoyed on a Saturday afternoon without the hassle of running to the next gate, carting suitcases up stairwells, and pointing a fire hose at my bank account. It was a version I could easily return to tomorrow should the mood strike again. Somewhere in the swathes of nutty cheese, I realized Aspen isn't just a dream to kick myself over and over again about not going. Instead, it's a decision I could make by boiling it down to the basics.

And that was the point. Sure, I could chase the "real" thing someday. Book the flight, buy the gear, avoid the trees. Maybe I will. But for now, I love that I don't have to wait for someday to experience something like it.

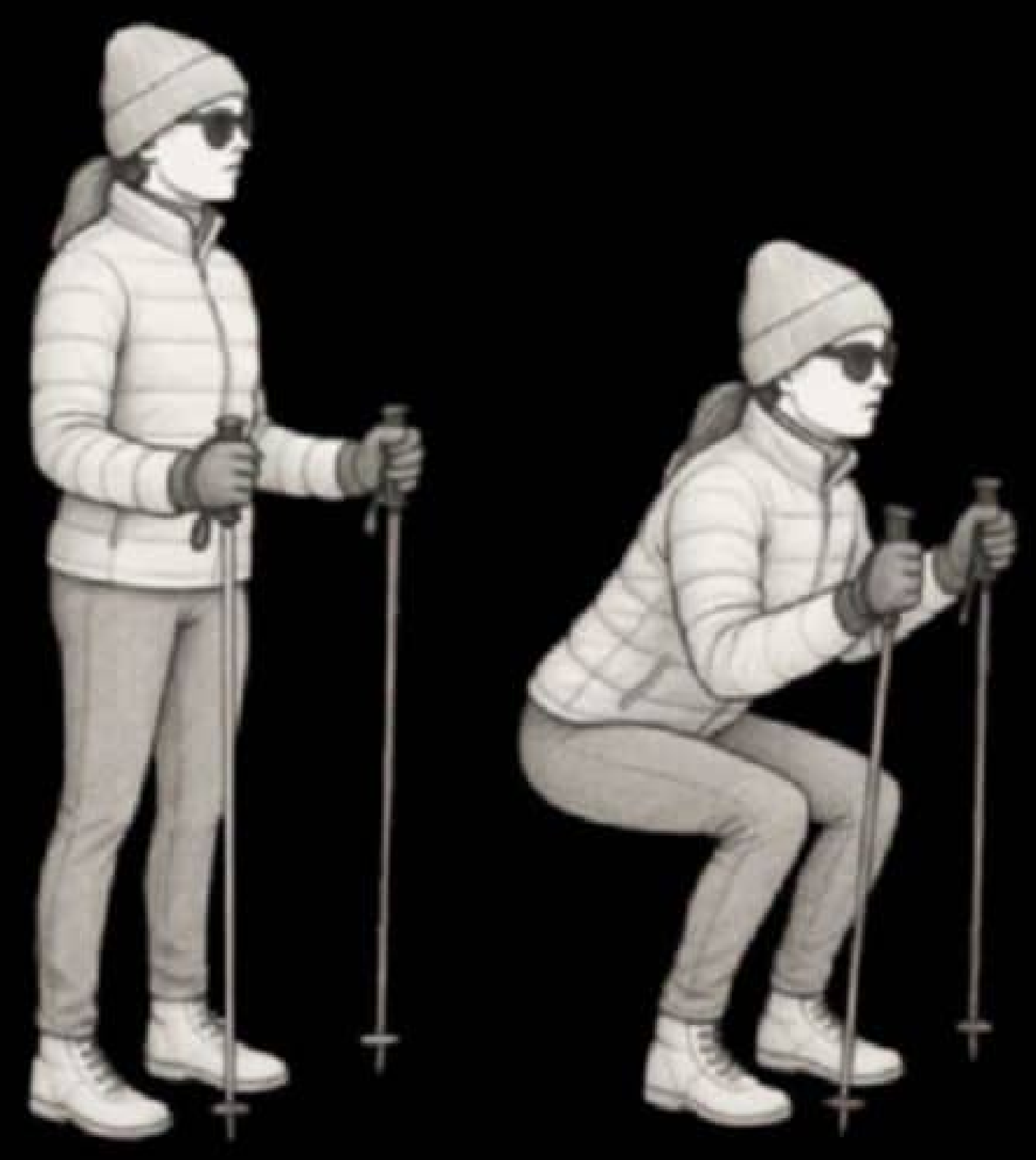
Aspen at home is ridiculous. But it's also genius.

And if I ever get tired of it—hey, there's always Facebook Marketplace. I might even put the rowing machine up with it, too.

Après Ski Workout

GONDOLA SQUAT

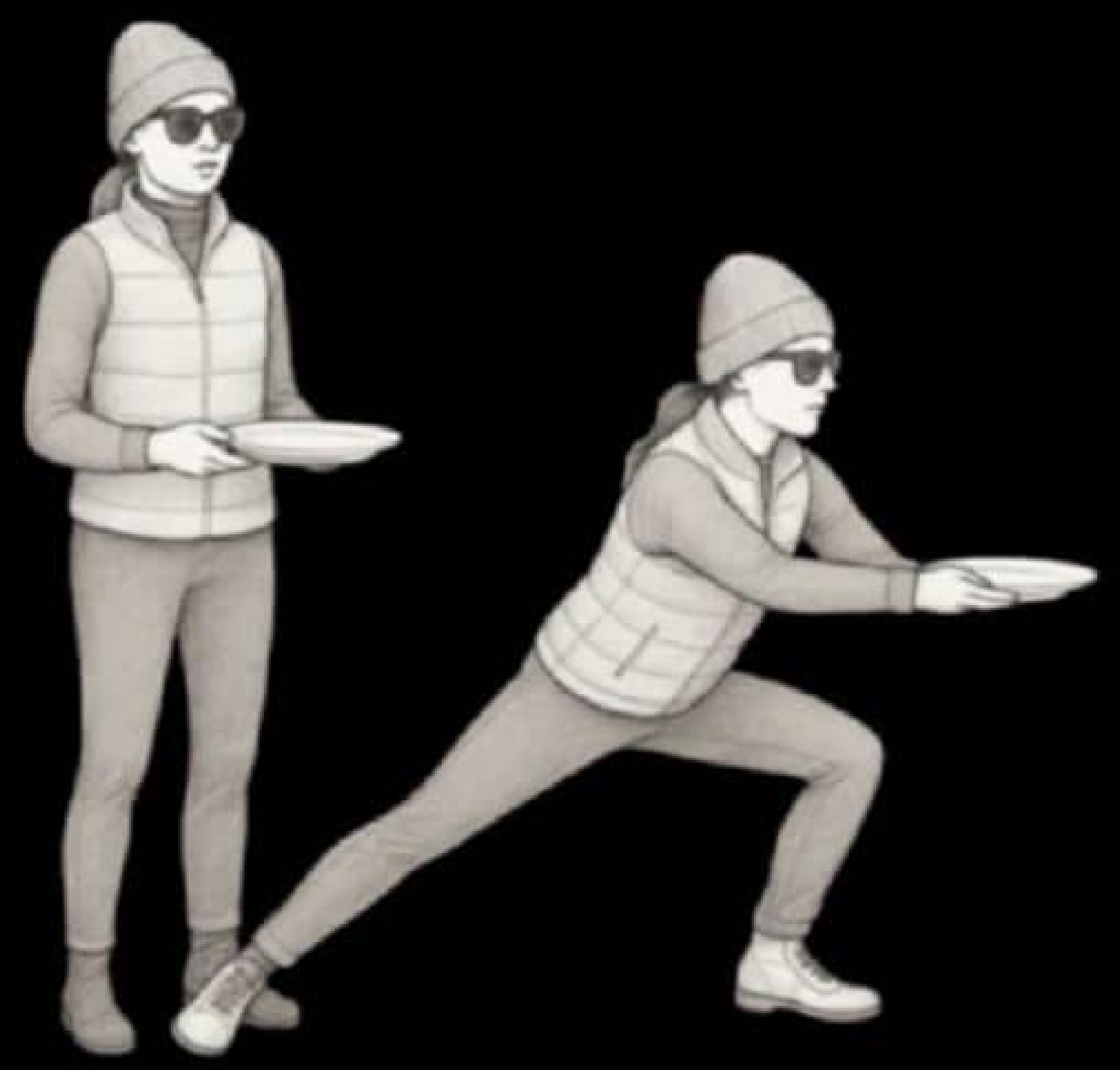
A controlled squat inspired by the moment you realize the gondola seat is way lower than your pride. Perfect for practicing that half-sit you do while trying not to drop your poles, your dignity, or your $14 hot chocolate.



1. Stand tall with poles at your sides.
2. Push hips back and bend knees into a controlled squat.
3. Hover at "gondola seat" height.
4. Keep chest lifted, core tight.
5. Rise back to standing.

BUFFET LINE LUNGE

A controlled side lunge designed to mimic the exact motion you'll make grabbing a plate at the hotel buffet while pretending you didn't just slip on melted snow. Precision, posture, and the quiet panic of brunch crowds.



1. Step wide to one side.
2. Bend the stepping knee, keeping the other leg straight.
3. Reach toward an imaginary plate.
4. Keep your back flat and core engaged.
5. Push off the foot to return to center.

APPLE SPRITZ

Torch the orange for added flavor

ALPEROL SPRITZ

Bright, bittersweet, barely dressed. The apple cider adds roundness and warmth to Aperol's otherwise edgy zest. Prosecco keeps it bougie; soda keeps it real.

INGREDIENTS

2 oz Aperol
2 oz apple juice or sparkling apple cider
3 oz prosecco, or dry bubbly
Splash of soda water
Orange slice or apple slice, for garnish

Play the bartender: Fill a large wine glass with ice. Add Aperol, apple juice, and prosecco. Top with a splash of soda water and give it a gentle stir. Garnish with an orange or apple slice.

Smoked brie topped with dried berries

Smoked Honey Brie

Yield: Serves 6-8

This baked brie balances smoke and sweetness into a bubbling, rich flavor bomb. Spiced apirct jam brings the fireside vibe and depth without overpowering the cheese. Dried fruit and nuts contrast the richness. A final drizzle of honey brings everything together.

INGREDIENTS

1 (8 oz) wheel smoked triple cream brie
2 tbsp apricot jam
1 tbsp honey
¼ cup mixed dried fruit (cherries, dates, or apricots), roughly chopped
¼ cup toasted walnuts, chopped
⅛ tsp garlic powder
⅛ tsp onion powder
⅛ tsp cayenne or chili powder
¼ tsp smoked paprika
⅛ tsp salt
¼ tsp brown sugar

1. **Prep the brie:** Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Place the brie in a small cast iron skillet or oven-safe dish.

2. **Make the spiced jam blend:** In a small bowl, mix the jam with smoked paprika, brown sugar, salt, garlic powder, onion powder, and cayenne.

3. **Build the topping:** Spoon jam over the brie. Add dried fruit and walnuts. Drizzle with honey.

4. **Bake for 12–15 minutes,** until the brie puffs slightly and the topping bubbles and caramelizes.

5. **Finish and serve:** Cool 5 minutes. Garnish with thyme. Serve warm with toasted rye slices, crostini, or crisp apple wedges.

APRÈS,

Skip the lift ticket line and turn your living room into a lodge-worthy escape. Our editors pulled together all the items that capture that crisp après energy we're all craving this season.

RECLAIMED SKI CHARCUTERIE BOARD

$60, ETSY.COM BY SKIARTISTRY

A conversation piece that doubles as a serving board. Handmade from reclaimed skis, it brings alpine nostalgia straight to your table. Ideal for brie, jam, or a whole après spread.

VIRTUAL REALITY HEADSET

$399, META.COM/QUEST

The future of escapism. Strap in, cue the mountain simulation, and let the world dissolve. The perfect companion for anyone who wants to travel without leaving the couch.

SKI HOME TRAINER

$349, TRYAEROSKI.COM

Your lift ticket to nowhere and everywhere. Get your heart rate up while pretending you're carving down the slopes of Aspen. Bonus: no altitude sickness, no ski pass, no judgment.

WASHED RIND
Blake Hill
The Cheese Pairing Collection
JASPER HILL FARM
Apricot
Orange & Honey
net wt. 10.8oz (306g)

APRICOT ORANGE JAM

$10, BLAKEHILLPRESERVES.COM

Bright, floral, and a little indulgent. This jam turns melted cheese into a masterpiece. The kind of pairing that makes you believe in simple luxuries again.

WONDERMADE
FIREBALL
4 OUNCES A Perfect Amount For Eating
16 MARSHMALLOWS

FIREBALL MARSHMALLOWS

$11, WONDERMADE.COM

Cinnamon heat meets soft sweetness. These marshmallows taste like winter parties and warm fires. Toast them, drop them in cocoa, or eat them straight from the box.

ELK HEAD BAR GLASSES

$75 (SET OF 4), ARTHURCOURT.COM

A little rugged, a little regal. These sculpted stag glasses turn every pour into a statement. Perfect for whiskey, spritzes, or whatever feels like a celebration.

HELSINKI CHEESE KNIFE SET

$60, GAURIKOHLI.COM

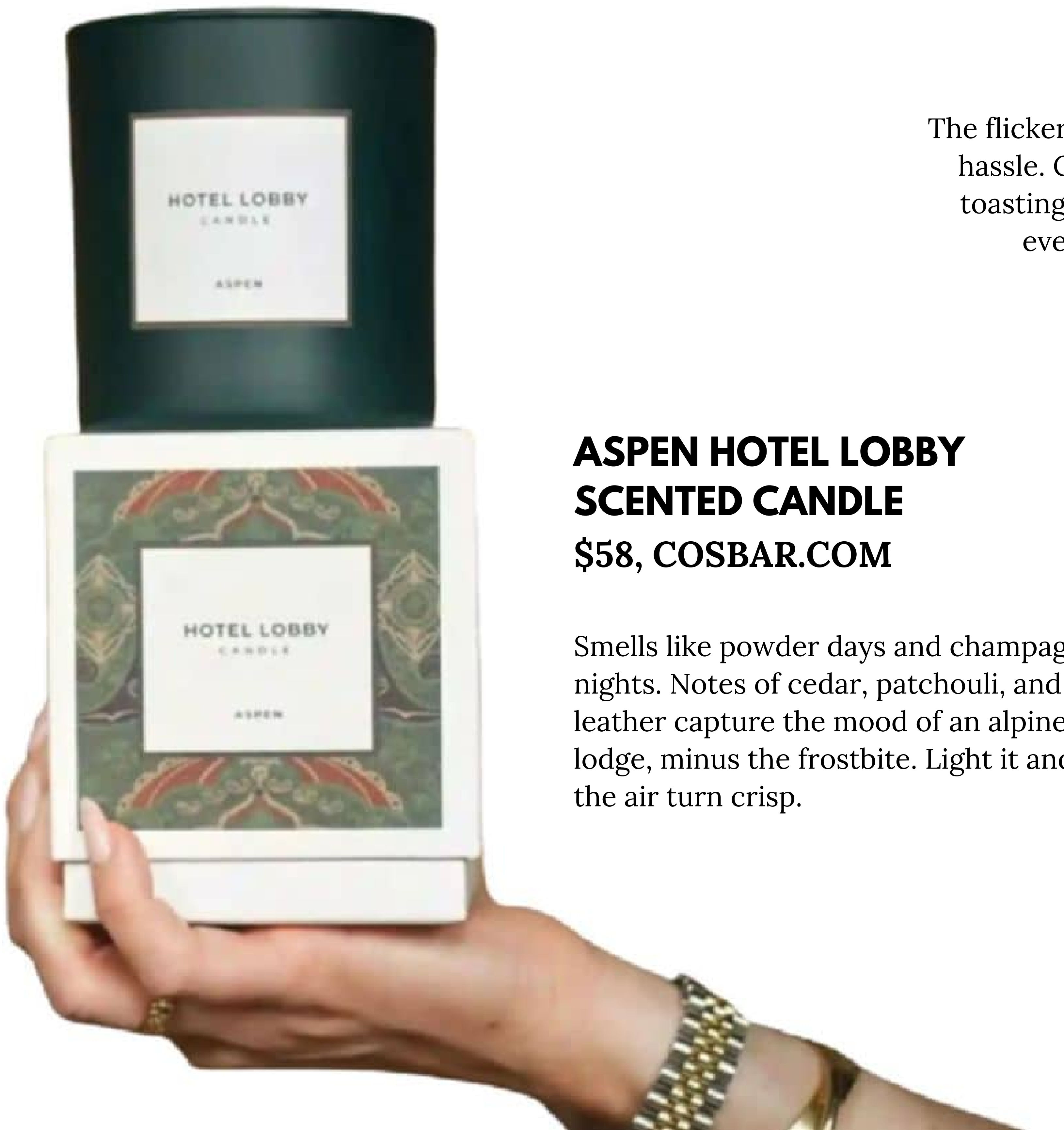
Braided handles, gold accents, pure elegance. These knives are proof that cutting into brie can be an aesthetic experience. They're as functional as they are photogenic.

AT HOME

INDOOR FIRE PIT AND S'MORES KIT

$119, SOLOSTOVE.COM

The flicker and warmth of a fire, minus the hassle. Compact, sleek, and designed for toasting marshmallows in style. Because every good après moment deserves something gooey.


HOTEL LOBBY
CANDLE
ASPEN
HOTEL LOBBY
CANDLE
ASPEN

ASPEN HOTEL LOBBY SCENTED CANDLE

$58, COSBAR.COM

Smells like powder days and champagne nights. Notes of cedar, patchouli, and leather capture the mood of an alpine lodge, minus the frostbite. Light it and let the air turn crisp.

This holiday, give the gift of handmade.

Less about consumption, more about impact. Our felt stockings are hand made by Nepalese women in the comfort of their own homes. Each sale helps sustain a craft, a legacy, a human.

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IN GOOD COMPANY

BY STASIA NIEMEC //
PHOTOS BY AMIRA FRANZEN

Notes on singlehood, *redefining* celebration, *and the subtle art of* choosing your own *table*.

The four of us were draped across an Airbnb couch, fat and full of cheese, watching Home Alone: New York plastered onto the big-screen TV. December in New York has a way of making everything feel possible. Even for a bunch of 35+ women in sweatpants like us, surrounded by empty wine glasses and half-eaten tiramisu. I'd still have booked the trip even if no one else came.

Maybe it would only happen this once, but celebrating the holidays with friends in the same life stage as me turned out to be one of my better ideas. And I've had a few.

We'd picked New York. Antonia lived here in her twenties during her FIT years. She was our unofficial tour guide and walking Yelp review. She and I grew up about an hour and a half away. A train ride to the city is practically a rite of passage for all New Englanders. Except for Katie, who'd barely traveled beyond the campgrounds of southwest Connecticut, who needed mild threats to commit.

Yumei flew in from the Midwest. We met on Instagram a hundred years ago and Zoomed before nearly every Friday for two years, so I knew she wasn't a catfish. We linked up at JFK for the first time. Just imagine two over-caffeinated women dragging too many bags running down the terminal squealing about how short I am and how tall she is.

We took an Uber to Grand Central since neither of us were going to brave suitcases on the subway. The other two coconuts waited with bags, coats, and the gifts Antonia brought even though I begged her not to bring any. Friendsmas, we called it. No rules and no matching pajamas. Just dinner reservations at Shukette and the mutual understanding that we were rewriting the holiday playbook.

DEALT AN OFF-HANDED COMMENT

This trip technically started the year before. I'd like to think that Friendsmas was an idea that came on a whim and not the result of insensitive comments. Instead, we have dear Emily to partially thank, who sat across from me at a holiday dinner party.

I was a thirty-something and the only uncoupled person in the room. Not a horror story, but close. I'd considered skipping, but you can't call out of a gathering planned six months in advance without becoming the pathetic single who's also in a crisis.

I'd arrived ready for the interrogation: Why wasn't I dating? Had I tried Bumble? ("Yes, Sarah, and I met a man who skipped the normal small talk and plunged straight into his ex wife leaving him for his cousin.") The whole script was rehearsed. I came to the party laced with an excuse for nearly everything including one for why I wasn't dating the guy I sort of had a thing with earlier in the year.

Someone dealt a deck of cards for poker. I could at least win something with an ace in the hand and one on the table. It came down to me and Emily–engaged, smug, competitive–reeling in what could be called beginner's luck. Still, I won the hand. She threw down her cards, grabbed Danny's face, shot me a look, and cooed, "I don't need to win a card game. I already hit the jackpot."

The table laughed. I laughed too, because single women performing grace in public does not mean saying all the very rude retorts that popped into my head. Don't let them know your weaknesses. And if they strike one, certainly don't show it hurts. I stifled the nostril-flare, unclenched my jaw, and reached for my wine.

The entire drive home my foot was heavy on the gas as I replayed that comment. Pettiness never looks good on anyone. The fact that it bothered me as much as it did send me down a road of introspection that led to the only possible conclusion: I needed new friends.

REVENGE OF THE UNCOUPLED

Fast forward to September of the following year. I was power-walking through the neighborhood at dusk, earbuds in, fury leaking out of every exhale. Jessica had just called to announce her fourth pregnancy. She married at 22 to her first boyfriend and started having kids a minute afterwards. Not even thirty years old and lecturing me about life as if I were operating on half a brain cell.

"You don't know what you're missing," she chirps. "Being a mom is better than being single, you know. And just imagineall the sex you're missing."

Sure, Jessica. I'll take a seat here on my neighbor's porch for a minute to imagine all the sex I'm missing. What was I even thinking, doing everything but getting married?

I could write a thesis on how society glorifies coupledom while treating independence like a waiting room. But right then, I wanted to hurl obscenities into the wind. Relationships are more than sex. They're the day-to-day things. No one talks about how lonely the holidays can be for single people–not to mention how exhausting it is to do everything alone.

It's not jealousy; it's logistics. Buying double gifts on a single income. Carrying groceries without backup. No one to say, "I've got this, you relax." I love my independence, but believe me, I would like a co-pilot. Someone to stop at the store to grab the eggs for the side dish I promised. Even better, someone to trade inside jokes with during a layover in Charlotte.Of course I think about these things.

I spent the rest of the walk agonizing about the holidays. Two couples orbiting the gatherings would be pregnant andopinionated that year. I was determined to book a trip anywhere to get out of town. Maybe I'd book a trip to Fiji, build houses for orphans, or at the very least, sit alone in a cabin in the middle of the woods. It didn't matter where, I just knew it wouldn't be for the annual dinner.

Picking up speed to a run, I realized I wasn't angry at Christmas. I was angry at the conversations that came with it. And maybe–just maybe–the solution wasn't to keep attending the same tables.

Maybe it was time to build my own.

In all honesty, Emily, Jessica, and the rest of the peanut gallery didn't mean to be patronizing. They're still my people. They just haven't been single in decades. Emily's dated every man she's ever met. I'm not sure she's ever been single. Jessica married the first guy she's ever dated. That's great, I celebrate that. But they forget.

> ***"Sure, Jessica. I'll just take a seat here on my neighbor's porch and think about all the sex I'm missing out on."***

The only ones who didn't forget were the satellites of my friend circle. The ones I knew but weren't part of the main friend group. Yumei, Antonia, Katie–all of whom I've known for years but hadn't been particularly close to. Yet we were all in the same life stage. If anyone understood, it was them. And that's when it hit me. I didn't need new friends. I just needed the right ones in the room. That's when the idea popped into my head.

Yumei and I talked about a girls trip for a long time but never made formal plans. Katie was definitely in the same boat as me. She was on her third or fourth god-child and could use a day with adults. Antonia hadn't been spontaneous in decades. If any of us needed a trip, it was her. Popping a U-Turn at the end of the street, I raced back to look at flights.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

My first pitch was an Alaskan cruise–an optimistic fever dream that would've ended in mutiny. I pivoted to New York: familiar, central, easy to escape if things went south. The group chat was chaos: "Do we bring gifts?" "Is this a cult?" "Where will we stay?"

I scheduled a Zoom to get everyone organized and to introduce faces beforehand. Three introverts and an extrovert pretending to be spontaneous needed a reality check before we did anything stupid. It was so awkward I nearly canceled the trip. But they did show up to the call–and extroverted Yumei was already sold–and that was all we needed.

Meeting in person felt like the pilot of a TV episode destined to be cancelled and then somehow renewed. Antonia, effortlessly chic as always. Yumei, armed with an arsenal of energy and asking where the nearest gym was. Katie, regretting she even left the house but trying her best. The Airbnb looked nothing like the apartments on Sex and the Cityor Friends, but it did have a sliver of holiday lights and it sat above a Chinese restaurant. Perfect.

We dumped our bags and raided Eataly for the epitome of girl dinner: an assortment of cheeses, olives slick with oil, imported Italian crackers, and a drawer-sized pan of Tiramisu. Then, an obligatory espresso and sidecar pistachio cream puff before heading off to Ten Ichi for sushi and poke bowls. We wandered the Union Square Holiday Market to score honey and chocolate chip cookies.

By the end of the second night we were draped around the couches, wine glasses in hand, watching Home Alone and heckling Peter McCallister. Someone cried. Someone laughed until she snorted. Somewhere between the wine and the laughter, I found myself actually feeling festive for the first time in a long time. It was the best holiday gathering I've ever had.

IN THE COMPANY OF WOMEN

Our last lunch before the airport was accidental perfection. A tiny café in Upper West, twinkling lights, and a cute waiter with sharp wit. We were tired but still a little sentimental. The conversation poured like good champagne–bad Tinder profiles, worse dates, and the weird grief of life taking a different route than expected.

Something shifted. The collective exhale of women who had finally been seen. No one tried to fix anything. We just listened and nodded, not in a rehearsed prescriptive way, but out of understanding. The best therapy I've ever had came with bad coffee and three women who got tired of the big, hairy BS.

> ***The best therapy I've ever had came with bad coffee and three women who got tired of the big, hairy BS.***

The trip didn't change our relationship statuses. We still went home to empty apartments and unwatered plants. But we also went home lighter. Seen. Connected. Happy.

There's power in surrounding yourself with people who share your current season. It's not exclusion. Married friends can love you deeply, but they can't always speak your language. There's a shorthand among people in your life stage tribe. Maybe it's a raised eyebrow, a half-smile, or even an unspoken *same here*. For us, Friendsmas put together the parts of us that needed healing during some of the loneliest times of the year.

THE SOUVENIR WORTH SAVING

This year I'm happy to say I've found someone special. I'm not in the same life stage as I was last year, but I'm still planning a Friendsmas because this isn't a stopgap ritual. It's proof that joy doesn't belong only to couples. We've even tossed around the idea of incorporating a group blind date night on our trip for those of us who are still single, just to see what happens. Worst case scenario, we have something to laugh about the rest of the trip.

For us, Friendsmas was the antidote to the season's ruthless ache. A reminder that connection can still be curated. That waiting doesn't mean standing still. Whatever next year looks like, I'll keep this. The single season isn't a curse. We need to start acting like it's a chapter worth celebrating.

Start by inviting the right people to the table.

RADIO CITY
MUSIC HALL
Hall RADIO CITY
CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR STARRING THE RADIO CITY RO

Itinerary

FRIENDSMAS

New York City

There is no better time to visit New York than when the city feels gift-wrapped in lights. From the smell of roasted chestnuts near Union Square to the echo of skates at Rockefeller Center, winter in Manhattan turns even the simplest plans into small celebrations. Here is how to spend three days soaking in the best of the season without losing your mind in the crowds.

DAY 1 - CHECK IN → CHELSEA

Arrive at **JFK Airport** and take the subway to **Grand Central Station**, the city's grand marble gateway. Check into **1 Hotel Central Park**, a sustainable and serene stay steps from the park's southern entrance.

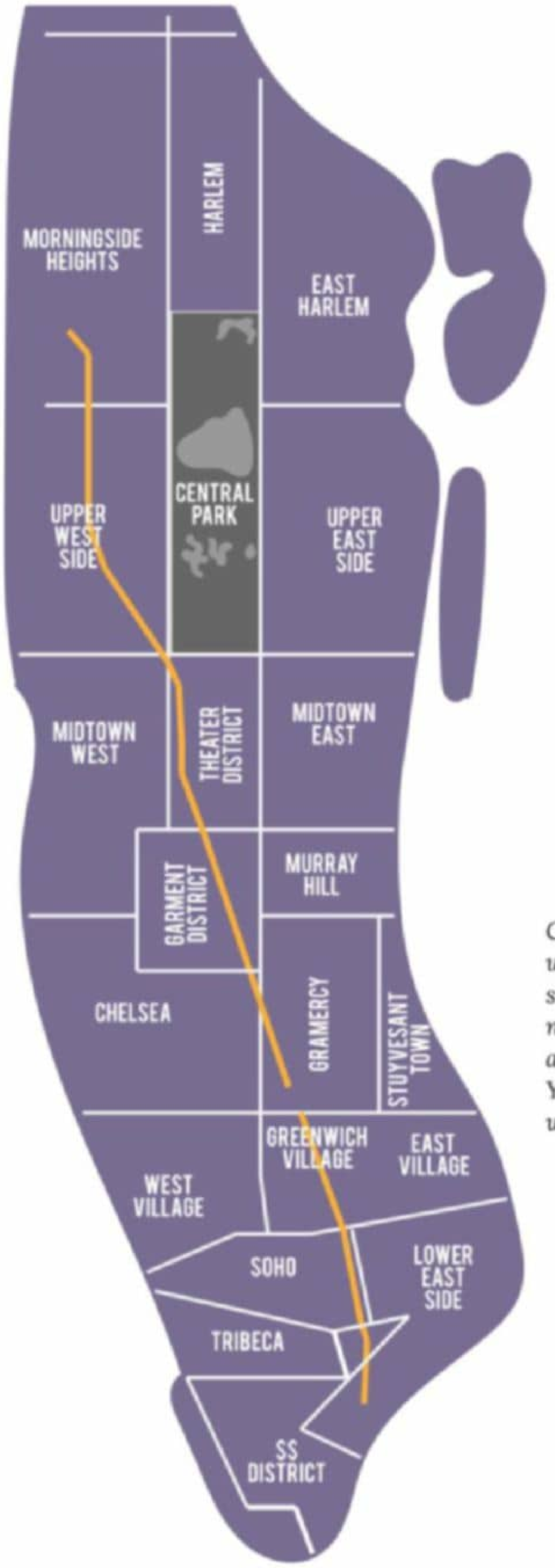
Ease into the afternoon at **Chelsea Market**, an easy first stop for a bite and a bit of shopping. Grab lunch from one of the food stalls, wander through **Posman Books**, and pick up a few snacks to keep at the hotel.

As night falls, visit the **Union Square Holiday Market**, alive with the scent of cider and pine. For dinner, book a table at **Shukette**, where the joojeh chicken and lamb skewers are legendary and the tahini ice cream with halva floss is unforgettable.

End the night with a midnight carriage ride through **Central Park**. The one-hour tour begins at the park's south entrance, within walking distance of the hotel, and includes photo stops under the sparkling trees.

DAY 2 - ICONS + ILLUMINATION

Sleep in and enjoy a late breakfast at the hotel before walking up Fifth Avenue to **The Met**. See the museum's famous Christmas tree, then imagine yourself at the Met Gala before taking a cab to **Carnegie Hall** for a behind-the-scenes tour.


HARLEM
MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS
EAST HARLEM
UPPER WEST SIDE
CENTRAL PARK
UPPER EAST SIDE
MIDTOWN WEST
THEATER DISTRICT
MIDTOWN EAST
MURRAY HILL
GARMENT DISTRICT
CHELSEA
GRAMERCY
STUYVESANT TOWN
GREENWICH VILLAGE
EAST VILLAGE
WEST VILLAGE
SOHO
LOWER EAST SIDE
TRIBECA
SS DISTRICT

From there, a short walk south brings you to **Rockefeller Center**, where the Christmas tree and ice rink are in full holiday form. Stop at **Magnolia Bakery** for banana pudding, then swing by **Radio City Music Hall** to see the **Christmas Spectacular**.

For dinner, book a table at **Le Rock**, a moody French brasserie located nearby. Order a glass of red wine and steak frites before stepping back into the glow of the city lights.

DAY 2 - LAST BITE → JFK

Start the day slowly with a bagel from **Ess-a-Bagel** or **Russ & Daughters**. Buy a few extras to bring home. Leave your luggage with the hotel concierge and head to the **Upper West Side** for one last walk through the city.

Browse the **Columbus Circle Holiday Market** for last-minute gifts, then stop at **Levain Bakery** for warm cookies and **Milk Bar** for a bottle of cereal milk. Before heading to the airport, pick up a babka at **Zabar's**, a pastry from **Solid State**, or a falafel from **Mamoun's**.

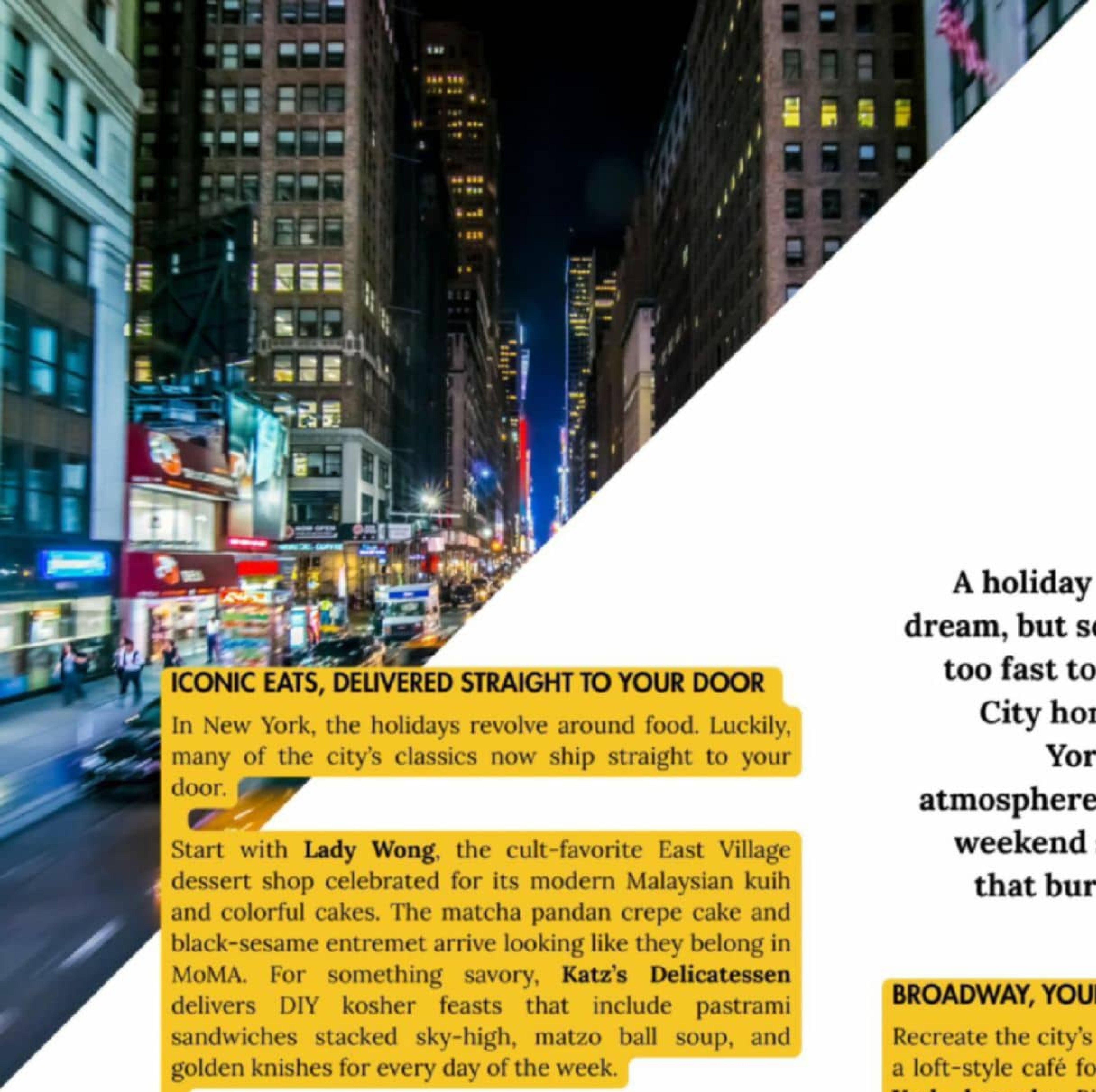
Collect your bags in the afternoon and make your way back to **JFK Airport**. Watch the skyline disappear from the cab window and start planning your return trip. There's a reason why they say, "I love New York!"

Getting around New York City is best done using the subway. If you're not familiar with the subway system or don't want to bother with navigating, Uber will generally have better fares and easier accessibility than taking a cab. New Yorkers walk (fast), so plan on doing a lot of walking to get around.

DRESS THE PART

Styled like a true New Yorker, we suggest blending the lines between fashion and practicality. Everlane Cashmere Boxy Turtleneck in canvas ($268, everlane.com). The North Face Hydrenalite™ City Long Down Hooded Parka ($350, thenorthface.com), Squirrels Bag Doctor Bag in black ($140, etsy.com SqurrelsBags), Re/Done High Rise Loose Jean ($275, shopredone.com), Piper Beanie in black ($97, janessaleone.com), Børn Cove ankle boot in black ($175, bornshoes.com).

From left to right: Levain Bakery's double chocolate chips(credit: @LevainBakery), Met Museum (Nikki Newton); Banana Pudding (@MagnoliaBakery); Central Park (Nikki Newton)



NYC

»» at home

A holiday trip to New York City is the dream, but sometimes the season moves too fast to squeeze in a trip. Bring the City home to you with some of New York's iconic eats and the right atmosphere. Turn it into a staycation, a weekend sleepover, or a dinner party that burrows the best of New York's energy.

ICONIC EATS, DELIVERED STRAIGHT TO YOUR DOOR

In New York, the holidays revolve around food. Luckily, many of the city's classics now ship straight to your door.

Start with **Lady Wong**, the cult-favorite East Village dessert shop celebrated for its modern Malaysian kuih and colorful cakes. The matcha pandan crepe cake and black-sesame entremet arrive looking like they belong in MoMA. For something savory, **Katz's Delicatessen** delivers DIY kosher feasts that include pastrami sandwiches stacked sky-high, matzo ball soup, and golden knishes for every day of the week.

Both **Levain Bakery** and **Magnolia Bakery** ship their signature sweets nationwide. Try Levain's chocolate peanut-butter-chip cookie and Magnolia's original banana pudding. **Zabar's** brings the Upper West Side to you with smoked fish, babka, and coffee that tastes like a brisk morning walk on Broadway. For dim sum, **Nom Wah Tea Parlor** sells its famous Doyers Street dumplings by the dozen, and **Mamoun's Falafel** partners with Goldbelly for late-night nostalgia. Add bagels from **H&H** or **Russ & Daughters** and you're halfway to Midtown before the coffee even brews.

For dessert trays worthy of a Brooklyn bakery window, order from **Circo's Pastry Shop**, whose pignoli, rainbow, and almond cookies are the real thing. Order two boxes —one to share and one to hide. Just trust us.

BROADWAY, YOUR WAY

Recreate the city's pulse by transforming your home into a loft-style café for the night. Cue up a **playlist of New York legends**: Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, and a little Beastie Boys for balance. Fill the room with candlelight and greenery; a few potted ivies or a simple floral arrangement that could have come straight from Chelsea's flower district.

Serve dinner in courses like a tasting tour. Pass small plates, mix a proper **Manhattan Cocktail** straight from a speakeasy, and keep conversation unfiltered. Hang a string of lights clipped with black-and-white photos of the city for that cozy apartment glow. Skip the oversized tree; instead, style a tabletop topiary wrapped in white lights and red ribbon, a miniature nod to the **Cartier** building on Fifth Avenue.

The goal is to capture the New York City spirit for an evening. Make it lively, generous, and unforgettable.

Stay Golden

Golden milk turned into a cookie delivers everything you'd ever want in a milk and cookie situation. Warm spices paired with creamy white milk chocolate delivers a gooey, cozy bite.

Light *Up* *The* Night

One bite and you're somewhere in Old Delhi, sitting in a café that looked like it hadn't decided what century it belonged to. Ceiling fans the size of satellites turning slow as thoughts. The smell of freshly cracked pepper and sultry turmeric drifts out of a small outdated kitchen in the back. A bite of chewy sunlight flecked with bits of creamy milk. Golden milk, they call it. No foam, no pomp, no frills. Just warmth and color.

Golden milk has been around for centuries, long before it became a buzzword. The drink originates in India and is used almost as a tonic. Turmeric, its star ingredient that gives its iconic warm hue, is said to calm the body, support digestion, and bring warmth during the colder months. The color alone feels therapeutic--a deep ochre yellow reminiscent of a golden hour sunset. The kind yellow that seems to fix everything from bad moods to bad weather. A dream, really.

If you love the comfort of chai or the sweetness of hot cocoa, golden milk sits somewhere in between. It's creamy and soothing with an earthy, grounded flavor. Where cocoa is nostalgic and chai is romantic, golden milk brings the coziness you'd expect from a warm cup of milk laced with exotic spices.

For this recipe, we blended our two favorite things: cookies and milk. The result is a thick, chewy chocolate chip cookie with a distinctly South Asian twist. The dough carries turmeric and cinnamon for earthy depth, and creamy white chocolate chips for balance. The flavor is anything but expected. These golden milk cookies are more delicately fragranced than gingerbread, its European cousin, despite the presence of turmeric and black pepper.

If you're craving something cozy and want a change of pace when it comes to desserts, the Golden Hour cookie is absolutely worth try. They're soft, fragrant, and a soothing update to a classic comfort food.

GOLDEN MILK COOKIES

YIELD: 10 LARGE COOKIES

Twice the spice, twice as nice. Decadently fragrant brown sugar cookies flecked with creamy white chocolate chips and filled with a creamy truffle center.

2 ¾ cups (345g) all-purpose flour
1 tsp (4g) baking powder
½ tsp (2g) baking soda
1 tsp (5g) fine sea salt
1 ½ tsp (3g) ground turmeric
1 tsp (2g) ground ginger
1 tsp (2g) cinnamon
Pinch of black pepper
1 cup (226g) cold unsalted butter, cubed
¾ cup (150g) brown sugar
½ cup (100g) granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1 ½ tsp (6g) vanilla extract
1 ¼ cups (210g) white chocolate chunks
10 white chocolate truffles, unwrapped & frozen

1. Cream the butter + sugars: Beat cold cubed butter with sugars until light and creamy (3–4 mins). Add eggs one at a time, then vanilla.

2. Add dry ingredients: Whisk together flour, leaveners, salt, and spices. If you have the time, toasting the spices will add more concentrated flavor. Add to wet mix and beat until just combined.

3. Fold in mix-ins: Stir in the white chocolate chunks until evenly distributed.

4. Portion + stuff: Scoop dough into 10 large balls (about 1/3 cup each). Flatten slightly, press a frozen truffle into the center, and wrap the dough fully around it, sealing the seam.

5. Chill the dough: Freeze for 30 minutes or refrigerate for at least 1 hour for best structure. Don't skip this step, it helps to let the flavors marinate. Leave in the fridge for up to 3 days for best results.

6. Bake: Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Line baking sheets with parchment. Bake 6 cookies per tray for 11–13 minutes, or until edges are golden and centers look just set. Don't overbake.

7. Cool: Let cool on sheet for 10 minutes before moving. Serve warm to let the truffle do what it was born to do.

Make Ahead: Rifrigerate stuffed dough for up to 3 days, or keep frozen for up to 1 month. Bake straight from frozen.

SIGNATURE COLLECTION

KENZINGTON

ROYAL GUARD

KENZIES
LONDON

cookies against CAPITALISM

the revolution against consumer culture and the most modern luxury money can't buy

by Kenzie Truesdale

By the time December hits, generosity hits its limit. Somewhere between Black Friday and the tenth office Secret Santa, the act of giving becomes yet another obligation on a crowded list of holiday duties. The season gets optimized and stripped of the human fingerprints that once made it matter.

This year, we're stepping away from the fanfare. We're trading Saturdays spent ripping doorbuster appliances off the shelves, bloating our credit cards, and obsessing over whether we've done "enough."

Instead, we're buying the discount mixer for ourselves. We're stripping off the Holiday Operations Manager hat and tying an apron over our best cocktail dress to stay at home. We're doing something different. We're baking. More specifically, we're reinventing the concept of holiday cookie gifting.

The once-humble ritual of gifting baked goods is not a retreat into domesticity that makes independent women like us think twice about picking up a spatula. In fact, it's anything but. We're saying no to performing the holiday script on cue and actively reengineering what it means to have a holiday. We're not here to resurrect tradition; we're just refusing to inherit its bad taste.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE GIFT ECONOMY

It's no secret that the holidays can run materialistic. In 2024, Americans spent a whopping $964 billion on holiday gifts, according to the National Retail Federation. Surveys show that nearly 70 percent of recipients can't even remember who gave them what two weeks later. The market rewards thoughtless abundance over meaningful intent, proof that the dopamine purchase often matters more than the intimacy of effort.

At the same time, cultural fatigue with consumption is peaking. The dopamine hits are not hitting like they used to. The haul videos feel overdone. People are craving gifts that feel meaningful, not just cost something.

Artificial intelligence is accelerating the tension. OpenAI's ChatGPT, the most popular AI model, announced a partnership with Shopify that lets users prompt for gift ideas and receive a stream of buys pulled from Shopify's catalog. Rather than think about the gift, we're giving up the agency to an algorithm that can predict what we might like. Friction drops, convenience rises, and yet the gap remains. This personal gift concierge will only exacerbate the problem. After all, searches can think for you on what to buy, but they can't replace the human hand that makes the gift memorable.

Not all hope is lost; a silver lining can be found in the most unexpected of places. Retail experts predict a shift away from the commercial excess that has dominated since the 1980s. Since 2020, retail has shifted from big-box stores toward artisans and niche brands.

Intentional gift-giving has now entered the chat: handmade ceramics, sourdough starter trades, playlist exchanges, and yes, cookie boxes. These handmade gifts come with a price, putting them in some cases on the same price tier as luxury brand goods but without the recognizable label. Still, these homemade gifts sit at the intersection of value and values, with the market noticeably forgoing brand names that once held market power in favor of unknown artists.

Such is proof that luxury is not what you buy–it's what you make time for.

> **In the new economy of care, time is the ultimate currency.**

THE RETURN OF THE HAND

Homemade gifts carried baggage for years, taking a backseat to the newest game console or the viral buttery soft leggings. They somehow became too personal for coworkers and too cheap for friends. Even worse, demoted to be only a stereotypical "good girl" gesture or the overextended PTA mom aesthetic.

The meaning of handmade underwent a serious PR campaign that upended negative perspectives of handmade gifts post-pandemic. When the world shut down, everyone turned to hobbies to pass the time in lockdown. We baked, we did arts and crafts, we created podcasts. Suddenly, handmade wasn't so awful.

A whole entire generation learned to make banana bread through shared TikTok videos and the collective experience of a rotting bunch of bananas on all of our counters. That collective flour-covered trauma rewired something deep in our culture. Now, even as life accelerates again, the act of making retains its charge. It's not retrograde; it's radical.

Now look at us. A hand-baked cookie box in 2025 isn't a cozy throwaway. It's couture.

"Baking is a power move," says freelance cultural analyst Lila Moreno, who tracks data for artisan makers. "Everyone's addicted to convenience. But doing something the hard way signals agency. We don't have a lot of control in other areas of life, but making something says we still have control over our time."

The aesthetics are following suit. Gone are the days of the gingham tins and curly "Santa's Treats" fonts. The new cookie boxes get their own adult makeover with kraft paper, linen ribbon, and Pantone-matched wax seals. They're styled like fragrance launches: minimal, tactile, luxurious. These aren't 90s-era bake sale cookie boxes. These are artisan seasonal launches straight from our own kitchens.

RETHINKING A TRADITION

The idea of gifting cookies has European DNA. In Germany, families exchanged lebkuchen, deeply aromatic gingerbread laced with nuts and dried fruits. In Sweden, crisp pepparkakor carried luck if you ate one without breaking it. In Italy, food marked rite and season, and baked gifts held a place just shy of the saints they honored.

Immigrants brought those rituals to America, where they collided with post-war suburbia and Tupperware. By the 1980s, the cookie swap became a ritual of belonging. Matching tins, red sweaters, friendly competition at home and on TV. Then, somewhere between Pinterest boards, Whole Foods aisles, and rising butter prices, the cookie box gift faded.

Millennials and Gen Z didn't rush to take the torch. Not out of disdain for church bake sale favorites, but out of boredom. With global access to every cookie from every culture, why repeat peanut butter blossoms from 1973? Why host a swap when you could DoorDash Levain? Why make a ten-dollar batch when you can drop a Benjamin Franklin on a launch from Last Crumb?

That is, until now. A growing crowd of design-minded bakers is redefining what it means to gift cookies. The shift isn't nostalgia; it's authorship. A new wave is picking up the format and curating it rather than inheriting it. Trends, like dough, rise again, but this time the rise favors taste over quantity. Think in terms of a curated cookie box that delivers the excitement of a launch without reading like a cop-out.

THE REBRAND OF HOMEMADE

Let's be clear, this is not a sentimental revival–this is a rebrand. Craft as autonomy, and a dough-covered finger on the pulse of trend. Cookie Box 2.0 steers away from the same classics and puts new flavors into the spotlight. The humble cookie box now reads like a SoHo gallery. Edible pieces crafted to sit alongside a trendy oatmilk cortado.

The renaissance is about personal taste colliding with global influence. We're no longer at the mercy of trading cookbooks and stumbling upon a secret family recipe. Baking has been delightfully democratized with the internet and social media. Nowadays, baking is seen as a power play for influencers showcasing unique bites and techniques. Homemade now reads more bougie than broke. And the people are ready for it, literally and aesthetically.

Economists call it symbolic capital: the way taste signals belonging to a tribe. In the 2020s, that tribe is definitely not the PTA; it's the creative class. It's the people who want to live beautifully and efficiently. The ones who put away the need to spend money frivolously and curate space for creativity.

And while the resurgence of handmade isn't born from nostalgia, that doesn't mean nostalgia is ignored. It was just mined for parts. Bakers are remixing familiar flavors through new channels. Cakes, New York-style chocolate chips, and even homemade peanut butter show up with pop culture references rather than our mother's recipe cards. Think the Viennetta and Gloria Jean's as flavor inspiration, not boxed mix M&M cookies as a mandate.

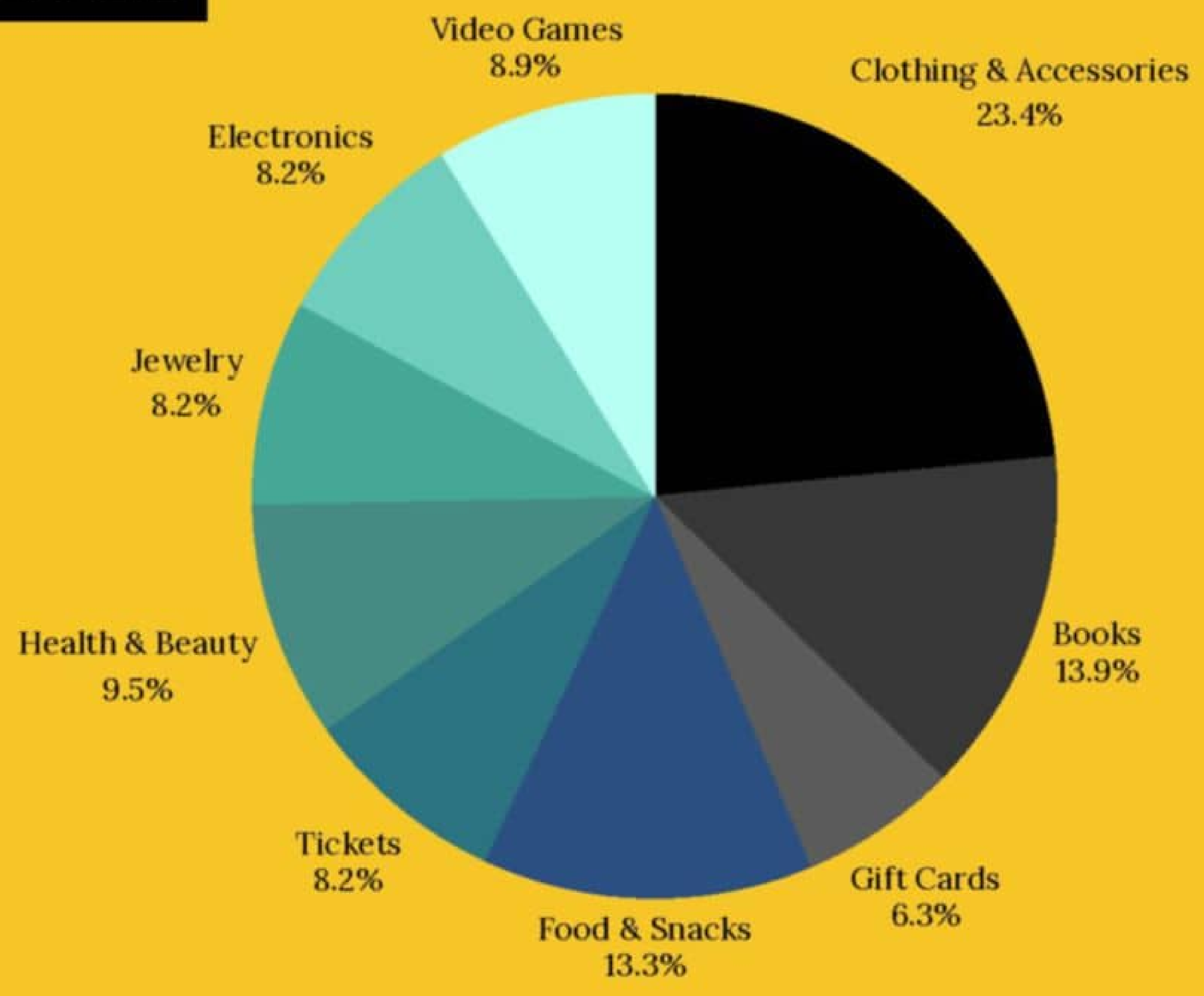
COOKIES AS CULTURAL CURRENCY

Nostalgic flavors are only part of the inspiration for baking. Global flavors have now become a cultural curiosity and a way to travel without leaving home. Ten years ago, many American grocery stores barely stocked cardamom. Now, Trader Joe's sells ube cookies. Costco carries Dubai pistachio chocolate bars. TikTok creators in Brazil are posting brigadeiro recipes that go viral in Copenhagen. The US's famous Buc-ee's gas station bakes are being sampled and rated on social media by Brits. Baking is no longer bound by heritage; it's a vehicle to something far beyond our own kitchen.

"Food is the most foundational basis of cultural exchange," says cultural expert Shirley Ting. "Communities are not monoliths, and we see that through food."

The old holiday celebrations prized

DATA DOESN'T LIE



GIFTS AMERICANS BUY

YOUGOV | HOLIDAY SHOPPING 2025: WHAT AMERICANS BUY, SPEND, AND VALUE AT CHRISTMAS

Americans are still gifting the usual suspects when it comes to holiday gifts. Clothing and accessories leads the pack with nearly a quarter of all gifts. Books and Food & Snacks round out the top three, with 13% and change.

The takeaway is clear. Holiday spending is concentrated in a handful of predictable, mass-market items, which shows how little disruption there is in the gift economy despite rising consumer fatigue and calls for more intentional buying.

To bake is to touch something real and to give something that holds the expense of time and thoughtfulness-something that can’t just be mass-produced or shipped with Amazon Prime.

sameness. The same recipes, the same china, the same ornaments. Identity is shifting along with everything else. Millennials are not interested in rolling out the same program. As the first generation largely shaped by technology and social proliferation, nostalgia itself becomes a reference point rather than a rule.

We’re seeing the effects of this in holiday celebrations where innovation and iteration are taking center stage. Take the nostalgia if you must, sift it, rework it, throw it out if you need to, then serve it back with an edge. The holidays are less “bring what you grew up on” and more “bring what you’re currently obsessed with.”

DESIGN AS APPETITE

The humble cookie box isn’t immune to the holiday innovation. What once used to be a sweet tin of brown sweets is now taking cues from charcuterie. In recent years, a curated board has gone from holiday staple to everyday luxury. Social media amplified the trend with Bring-Your-Own-Board parties that reimagined what constitutes charcuterie. Everything from taco boards and playful girl dinners suddenly became themes displayed on chopping boards. At its core, the board is a study in modern values: abundance made photogenic and pleasure made portable.

The cookie box presented in tray form is the sweet counterpart. Instead of a hapless mix of basic recipes, the cookie tray brings attention to the details: flavors, colors, textures, and decorations. It’s a focus of curation over quantity that expresses itself as a feast for the eyes and the tongue.

Aesthetics mirror the broader cultural shift. People want experiences that look, feel, and taste intentional. This means prioritizing a few high-quality bites that curate an experience rather than check the box. Handmade–handbaked–becomes the designer move.

Even with intention, perfection isn’t the point. Flaws are welcome. Handmade goods wear irregular shapes, inconsistencies, and the absence of machine-made decoration. A poorly iced cookie reads better than a machine-printed one. Once frowned upon, these “flaws” are the irrefutable mark of an artisan.

CRAFTING THE MODERN COOKIE BOX

Crafting a cookie box is an edible design that takes its cues from the charcuterie board in flavor. Personal aesthetic and tastes collide in such a way that reflects intentional design. Pull inspiration from color palettes, flavor stories, and emotions the way a stylist approaches a look.

When it comes to color palettes, think beyond food coloring. Warm reds suggest berry, wine, and red velvet flavors. Greens arrive through pandan, matcha, and pistachio. These colors bring excitement rather than filler. Add neutrals to balance the drama with almond, sesame, brown butter, and honey to round out the palate. The goal is not variety for its own sake, it’s cohesion. It’s an exploration of taste. Think about a preference for the unexpected over the run-of-the-mill.

Flavor stories should follow the same logic. Tell a story, don’t just fill a space. Maybe it’s a love letter to your Italian grandmother’s kitchen. Maybe its flavors are inspired by the trip to Morocco you can’t stop dreaming about. Maybe it’s a color palette inspired by a favorite outfit.

Emotions can take many forms, but one that our editors love is curated moments. The container of the box or tray can set the tone for the experience that inspired the bake.

Think resin trays, lacquer boxes, and vintage humidors lined with greaseproof paper. Containers that double as a gift extend the intention to eat now and enjoy later. Vintage panettone tins and empty cigar boxes replace novelty tins with character and story. Selecting the right container becomes a treasure hunt that turns the process into play.

THE GIFT OF PRESENCE

The creative process of a cookie gift is just as much a gift for the baker as it is for the recipient. We live in an era where work seeps into every crevice. A wireless phone keeps us connected to our work desk at all times. Work from home doesn’t always mean the standard 9-5 schedule.

Baking offers solace and an outright rebellion against the day-to-day grind. You can't multitask while browning butter. You can't answer emails with dough on your hands. Baking forces presence and focus. It's a much-needed tactile break from a digital system.

There's proof in the proverbial pudding: a 2023 survey found that 78% of Americans view cooking or baking as their primary form of stress relief. Research shows that creative activities like baking significantly reduce cortisol levels after just 45 minutes. That doesn't even account for the dopamine and serotonin of tasting–after all, licking the spoon is a necessary form of quality control.

TRADING WITH INTENTION

The beauty of the cookie box revival lies beyond sugar-crusted novelty. It's a message to a generation long unbothered by tradition as a script. Baking pulls the plug on a holiday measured by transactions and who scored the biggest deals. To bake is to touch something real and to give something that holds the expense of time and thoughtfulness–something that can't just be mass-produced or shipped with Amazon Prime.

This season, the obligation to participate in institutional consumerism can take a seat. Indulgent flavors replace overindulgent spending. Time spent crafting a box of homemade confections replaces the agony of lines, parking, and forced cheer. This season, we're not treating baking as a last resort. It's a deliberate move toward a counter-tradition that puts values at the forefront. And that's something to sink our teeth into.

DESIGN YOUR COOKIE BOX

1 PICK THE THEME

Choose a cohesive idea to inspire the collection, such as a color, cuisine, or core memory.

2 CHOOSE THE ANCHOR COOKIE

Select a visually striking or unique signature cookie to showcase in your box.

3 ADD TEXTURE COOKIES

Keep variety in mind. Chewy, crunchy, and soft textures keep each bite interesting.

4 ADD A FLAVOR CONTRAST

Consider adding flavor contrasts like salty, sour, and spicy flavors to break up the sweetness.

5 ADD A MINI OR BITE-SIZED FILLER

Small candies, nuts, and dried fruits add dimension and gives that luxe vibe.

6 ADD A SPARKLE OR TOPPING

Non-pereils, sprinkles, and a blow of luster dust is that last touch of glitter that makes everything picture-perfect.

IN GOOD SPIRITS

Who says a cookie box should behave? We pulled cues from our favorite speakeasy and built a cookie flight drinks like the night. Incorporating gold accents, bold flavors, and black lacquer lands the after-hours vibe. Featuring four memorable pours in cookie form: Moon Dust Macadamia Snowballs, Starlight Irish Cream Shortbreads, Gilded Butterscotch Thumbprints, and Opera Pistachio Cherry Bars.

STARLIGHT IRISH COFFEE STARS
Dark chocolate and coffee flavored shortbread cookie. Sexier than the mistletoe kiss!

MOON DUST MACADAMIA SNOWBALLS
Bitter citrus, cardamom, and buttery macadamia nuts dusted in just enough sugar to call it sinful.

OPERA PISTACHIO CHERRY BARS
Layers of pistachio frangipane, sicilian tart cherry crumble on top of a buttery crust. An Italian holiday in every bite.

GILDED BUTTERSCOTCH THUMBPRINTS
Spiced speculoos base with bourbon caramel cream filling. An adult version of a holiday favorite.

North Star Speakeasy

A holiday lineup inspired by late-night lounges and cocktail flights.

BY JENNA NEWTON // PHOTOS BY NIKKI DUNCAN

STEP INTO THE NORTH STAR: a holiday lounge tucked behind an unmarked door, recommended by those with incredible taste in food and fashion. Inside, the twinkling lights are low, bouncing off the baby grand piano's lacquer and reflecting in martini glasses. Velvet curtains swallow the city noise whole, leaving only the sounds of crooning carols and decadent conversation.

The bar works its magic with ice-cold cocktails cut with bourbon, espresso, and the occasional twist of citrus peel. These cookies match that same energy: a little sweet, a little mischief.

Moon Dust Macadamia Snowballs

YIELD: 30 COOKIES

Buttery macadamia tea cakes rolled in a generous dusting of powdered sugar and bursting with the warmth of cardamom and a hit of orange zest. Inspired by a White Negroni: bright, zesty elegance that keeps the richness in check and lets the orange oils sing.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup unsalted butter, room temperature (European-style, like KerryGold)
½ cup powdered sugar
1 ¾ cups all-purpose flour
2 tsp vanilla extract
1 tbsp freshly grated orange zest
½ tsp ground cardamom
½ tsp ground nutmeg
1 cup toasted, unsalted macadamia nuts, coarsely chopped

FOR THE COATING

1 cup powdered sugar
1 tbsp cornstarch

1. Cream it: Beat the butter and powdered sugar until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add vanilla, zest, and spices, then blend until smooth.

2. Fold and chill: Stir in the flour and macadamias. The dough should feel soft but cohesive. Cover and chill for at least 2 hours or overnight.

3. Roll and bake: Bring the dough to room temperature. Scoop into 1-inch balls and place 1 inch apart on a parchment-lined tray. Bake at 350°F for 12–14 minutes, until the edges turn barely golden.

4. Cool and coat: Let cool completely. Mix the powdered sugar and cornstarch in a bowl. Roll each cookie until it looks snow-covered.

Store smart: Keep in a tin up to a week, or freeze the unbaked dough for later. Coat only when ready to serve.

Gilded Bourbon Butterscotch Thumbprints

YIELD: 48 COOKIES

Speculoos spice and brown-butter depth, pressed with a glossy butterscotch bourbon caramel center and a touch of gold leaf. Paired to an Old Fashioned: signature bourbon warmth and bitters that echo the caramel and spice.

BOURBON BUTTERSCOTCH FILLING

1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
1 tbsp unsalted butter
2 tbsp pure maple syrup
1 tbsp dark brown sugar
Pinch of salt
1 tsp vanilla extract
1 tbsp bourbon

SPECULOOS COOKIE

½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
¾ cup dark brown sugar, packed
¼ cup granulated sugar
¾ cup cookie butter (such as Biscoff or Trader Joe's)
1 large egg
1 tsp vanilla extract
1 ⅔ cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp baking soda
½ tsp salt

1. Make the caramel filling: In a small heavy saucepan, combine condensed milk, butter, maple syrup, brown sugar, and salt. Cook over medium-low heat, stirring constantly with a silicone spatula, until the mixture thickens and pulls away from the sides of the pan, 8–10 minutes. It should fall from the spatula in slow ribbons. Remove from heat and mix in the vanilla extract and bourbon.

Transfer to a parchment-lined plate and cool completely. Refrigerate until firm, at least 1 hour or overnight.

12. Portion the filling: Lightly wet your hands and scoop 1-teaspoon portions of the chilled caramel. Roll each into a ball and set on parchment lightly sprayed with cooking spray or brushed with a thin layer of oil.

3. Make the dough: Beat butter, dark brown sugar, and granulated sugar in a stand mixer on medium speed until creamy, about 3 minutes. Add cookie butter, egg, and vanilla and mix until smooth. In a separate bowl, whisk together flour, baking soda, and salt. Add to the wet ingredients in two additions and mix until combined.

4. Shape and freeze: Roll dough into 1-inch balls and arrange on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Freeze until solid, at least 1 hour or up to 2 months. (Do not skip this step. It keeps the cookies perfectly shaped.)

5. Bake: Preheat oven to 375°F. Arrange frozen dough balls 2 inches apart on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake on the top rack for 5 minutes, until the balls have just puffed and settled into a dome shape.

6. Fill and finish baking: Remove cookies from the oven and quickly press the center of each with the back of a tablespoon measure to form a deep well. Dip hands in water and place a caramel ball into each well, slightly flattening it in place. Return to the oven and bake 9–10 minutes longer, until the cookies are browned around the edges and the caramel looks slightly blistered. Let cookies cool slightly on the sheet before transferring to a rack. The caramel will firm as it cools.

Starlight Irish Coffee Shortbread Cutouts

YIELD: 72 COOKIES (2.5" STARS)

Tender shortbread kissed with Irish cream and a jolt of coffee, half-dipped in dark chocolate and finished with gold-fleck nonpareils. Think Irish Coffee in cookie form: warm, coffee-forward, a smooth cream finish that lingers like last call.

SHORTBREAD COOKIES

2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
1 ½ tbsp Irish cream liqueur (such as Baileys)
1 tsp instant espresso powder
12 tbsp (1 ½ sticks) unsalted butter, room temperature
1 cup granulated sugar
1 large egg
1 tsp vanilla extract

DECORATION

12 oz dark chocolate, chopped
8 oz white nonpareils or sprinkles

1. **Make the dough:** In a medium bowl, whisk flour, baking powder, and salt. In a mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat butter and sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add the egg, Irish cream, espresso powder, and vanilla, and mix until smooth. Reduce speed to low and add the dry ingredients until just combined.

2. **Roll and cut:** On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough to ¼-inch thickness. Cut into 2 ½-inch stars and place 1 inch apart on parchment-lined baking sheets.

3. **Bake:** Heat oven to 350°F. Bake 8–10 minutes, or until edges are lightly golden. Cool 2 minutes on the sheet, then transfer to a rack to cool completely.

4. **Dip and decorate:** Melt chocolate gently in a heatproof bowl set over simmering water. Dip each cookie halfway into the chocolate, letting the excess drip off. Coat the dipped side with nonpareils and place on parchment until set.

Opera Pistachio Cherry Crumble Bars

YIELD: 20 SQUARES

Butter-crisp pasta frolla layered with pistachio frangipane and a tart cherry crumble, cut into clean, tuxedo squares. Best with a Black Manhattan: amaro's herbal bite meets cherry richness and lets the pistachio go 4K.

PASTA FROLLA BASE

¾ cup all-purpose flour
2 tbsp confectioners' sugar
⅛ tsp fine sea salt
5 tbsp cold unsalted butter, cubed
1 large egg yolk
½ tsp vanilla extract
1 tsp cold water, if needed

PISTACHIO FRANGIPANE

7 oz shelled roasted unsalted pistachios (about 1 cup)
2 tbsp granulated sugar
1 large egg + 1 egg white
1 tbsp unsalted butter, melted
1 tsp finely grated lemon zest
Pinch fine sea salt
1 tbsp all-purpose flour

CHERRY CRUMBLE TOPPING

100 g (¾ cup + 2 tbsp) all-purpose flour
40 g (3 tbsp) granulated sugar
24 g (2 tbsp) dark brown sugar, packed
2 tsp cornstarch
¼ tsp fine sea salt
2 tbsp cherry gelatin powder
1 oz (28 g) freeze-dried cherries, finely ground
60 g (4 tbsp) unsalted butter, melted and slightly cooled
⅛ tsp almond extract (optional)
Powdered sugar, for finishing

1. Make the Pasta Frolla Base: Heat oven to 350°F. Line a 9-inch round pan with parchment. Whisk flour, sugar, and salt. Cut in butter until coarse and crumbly. Add egg yolk and vanilla, mixing until dough just holds together. Add cold water, 1 teaspoon at a time, if needed. Press evenly into pan and dock lightly. Bake 12–14 minutes until set but not browned. Cool 10 minutes.

2. Prepare the Pistachio Filling: Pulse pistachios with sugar, flour, and salt in a food processor until fine. Add egg, egg white, melted butter, and zest; blend into a thick paste. Spread evenly over cooled base.

3. Make the Cherry Crumble: Whisk flour, sugars, cornstarch, salt, gelatin, and dried cherry powder until combined. Pour in melted butter and almond extract, mixing with a fork until clumpy. Sprinkle evenly over the pistachio layer.

4. Bake: Bake at 350°F for 25–30 minutes until the crumble is crisp and golden at the edges and the pistachio layer is just set in the center. Cool completely before removing from the pan.

5. Finish: Dust cooled bars with powdered sugar and slice into 12 squares.

Make Ahead: Freeze the cooled bars in an airtight container, uncut, for up to one month. Let defrost completely in the air tight container before cutting into squares. Dust with powdered sugar when ready to serve.

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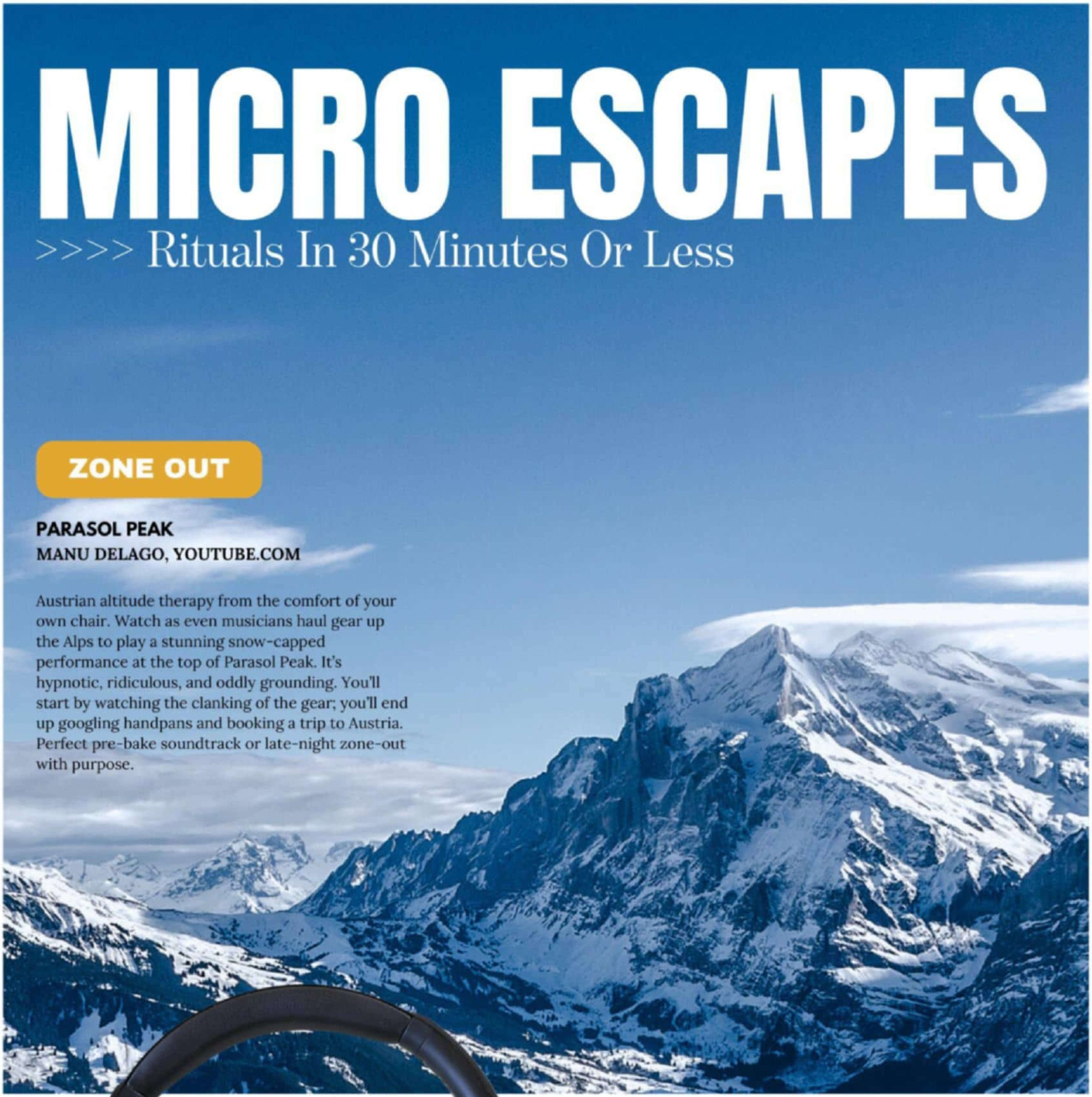

ZONE OUT

PARASOL PEAK
MANU DELAGO, YOUTUBE.COM

Austrian altitude therapy from the comfort of your own chair. Watch as even musicians haul gear up the Alps to play a stunning snow-capped performance at the top of Parasol Peak. It's hypnotic, ridiculous, and oddly grounding. You'll start by watching the clanking of the gear; you'll end up googling handpans and booking a trip to Austria. Perfect pre-bake soundtrack or late-night zone-out with purpose.

TUNE IN

NOTE TO SELF
PAYTON SARTAIN, DEARMEDIA.COM

Even if you only have time for half an episode, "Note to Self" delivers a full vibe shift. Host Payton Sartain blends influencer polish with real emotional depth. Think confident self-talk, boundary-setting, and figuring out who you are without losing your edge. It's honest, stylish, and soothingly self-aware. Perfect for a midday walk, a makeup-free night in, or that ten-minute window between chaos and calm.

FEEL COZY

SHEARLING MOROCCAN SLIPPER

$275, JENNIKAYNE.COM

This isn't comfort, this is armor for the domestic warrior. Slip them on, light a candle, and treat your living room like an alpine lodge with better Wi-Fi.

PANETTONE
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AMARENA
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EAT WELL

AMARENA CHERRY PANETTONE

$30, AMAZON.COM

Soft, slightly tart, and indecently good. Tear off a chunk, drown it in espresso, and call it your Italian language lesson. It's breakfast masquerading as a love affair. Of all the panettone, this is our favorite for its sweet and slightly bitter taste. We recommend turning it into stuffed french toast with a smear of nutella in the center.

SCENT THERAPY

ST. REGIS ROOM FRAGRANCE SPRAY

$85, SHOP.MARRIOTT.COM

The olifactory equivalent of ordering champagne from room service just becuase you can. Caroline's Four Hundred is the quintessential signature scent of New York's upper crust. Notes of cedar, suede, and high-thread-count sheets. Spray, exhale, and unwind..

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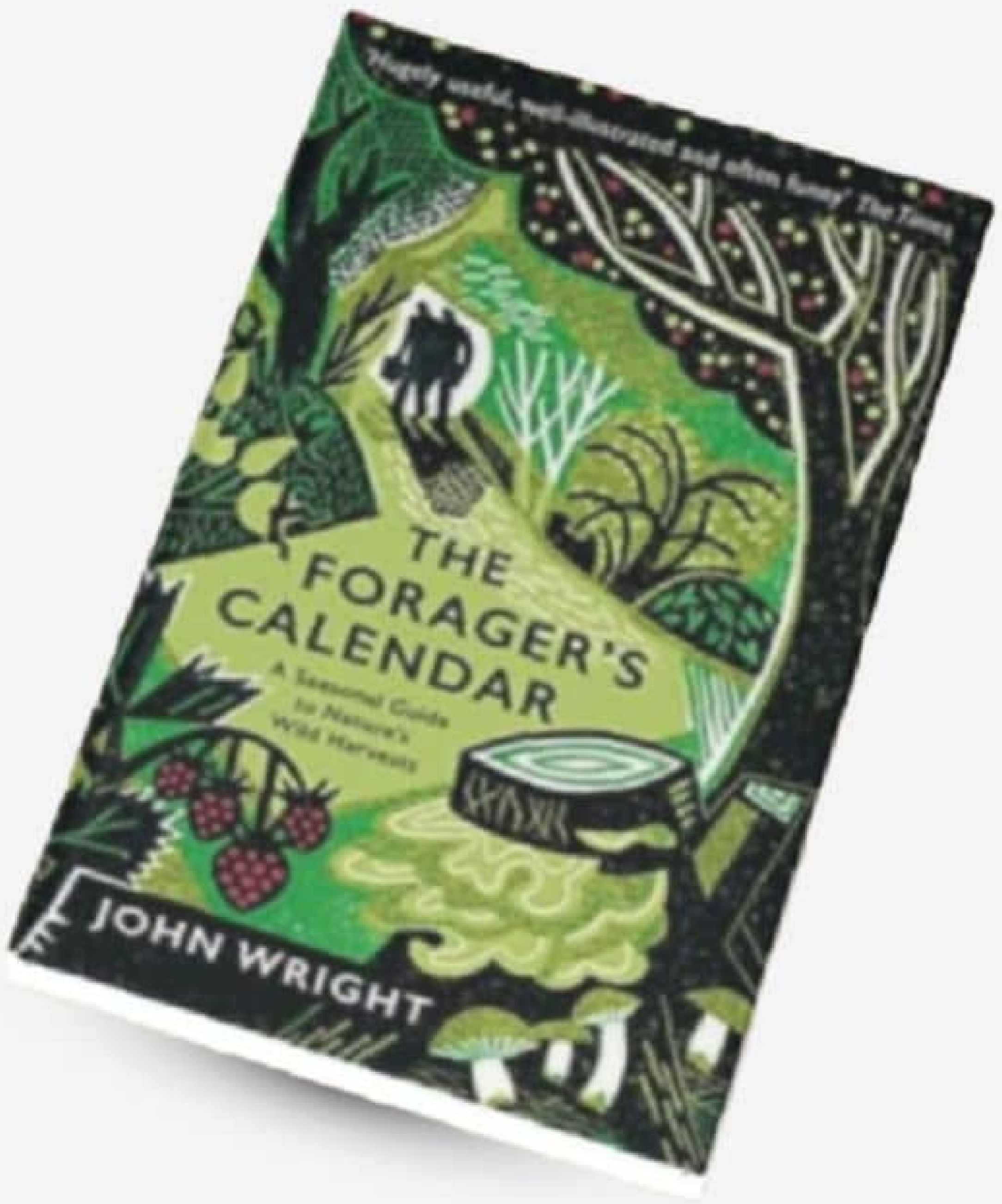

GET LOST

THE FORAGER'S CALENDAR GUIDE

$17, BARNESANDNOBLE.COM

Disconnect from your devices and vices with walk out in nature. Even in frost, the landscape hides ingredients worth finding. Juniper berries, rose hips, pine needs, and even dried seed pods are some of nature's bounty that you can candy or infuse into syrups. Pro tip: pinecone jam is a thing!

Vacation without using PTO.
out of office
Escape the grind with an afternoon of chic, champagne-fueled indulgence.
where dessert meets destination
BABES BAKE
MADELEINES